

VZCZCXRO6848

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DE RUEHTA #2567/01 3651016
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 301016Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4234
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 0985
RUCNCLS/SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0385
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1091
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 0557
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 0460
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHAST/USOFFICE ALMATY 1054

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 002567

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB/ESC, OES/PCI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [SENV](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: WATER RESOURCE COMMITTEE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN
DISCUSSES WATER SITUATION

REF: ASTANA 02156

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ministry of Agriculture Water Resource Committee Deputy Chairman Amirkhan Kenshimov highlighted the recent political agreement by the five Central Asian presidents on water use and energy delivery for the winter of 2008 and the first quarter of 12009. The related water-use protocol included provisions to increase the water level of the Toktogul water reservoir in Kyrgyzstan and agreement between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to provide Kyrgyzstan with coal, fuel oil, and gas to permit Kyrgyzstan to produce electricity at its thermal power plants. Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev's interstate Water Energy Consortium Initiative, designed to manage the combined issues of energy and water, is slowly "making progress," According to Kenshimov. The government launched the construction of the Koksaray Water Reservoir in southern Kazakhstan on June 25 with the goal to prevent winter flooding and increase control over crop irrigation in the dry summer seasons. END SUMMARY.

THE PRESIDENTS' AGREEMENT ON WATER

13. (SBU) Regional Environmental Officer (REO) and Environmental Assistant met recently with Ministry of Agriculture Water Resource Committee Deputy Chairman Amirkhan Kenshimov, who wanted to highlight the October 10 meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (see reftel) of the five Central Asian presidents, who reached a political agreement on water use and related energy source delivery. In a follow-on meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on October 18-19, the deputy prime ministers of the five Central Asian countries signed a detailed protocol on the efficient use of common water and energy resources in the region for the winter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009. This particular agreement is unique for Central Asia, Kenshimov said, because Turkmenistan had never joined similar agreements. In addition, since 2004, strong disagreements among the parties prevented them from signing multilateral water-use agreements. Kenshimov refused to speculate whether Russia used its

leverage this time to help the parties reach an agreement, but he did not deny the possibility.

SUPPORT FOR TOKTOGUL RESERVOIR

14. (SBU) Kenshimov said the water-use protocol included provisions to increase the water level of the Toktogul water reservoir in Kyrgyzstan, which is the largest water reservoir on the Narin River that feeds into the Syr-Darya River through the Toktogul hydropower plant, Kyrgyzstan's largest power plant. The Toktogul Reservoir is now dangerously low, he said, estimated at less than eight billion cubic meters. The plan is to raise the water level to 12.5 billion cubic meters before spring 2009 so that there would be sufficient water for irrigation. (NOTE: Toktogul's "dead level" -- the level at which the water is so low the turbines must be shut down to prevent damage -- is 5.4 billion cubic meters. Toktogul's maximum capacity is 19.5 billion cubic meters. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) To increase the water level, Kenshimov said the Toktogul hydropower plant will have to significantly reduce its power generation this winter. In the past, Kyrgyzstan would have faced acute power shortages. Under this new protocol, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have agreed to provide Kyrgyzstan with 300,000 tons of coal and 40,000 tons of fuel oil (Kazakhstan) and gas (Uzbekistan) so that Kyrgyzstan can produce electricity at its thermal power plants to compensate for the loss of power from Toktogul.

NAZARBAYEV'S WATER ENERGY CONSORTIUM INITIATIVE

16. (SBU) Kenshimov said Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev's water energy consortium idea was "making progress," albeit slowly. If eventually implemented, he said, the water energy consortium would be a comprehensive agency combining responsibilities for water and energy resource supply and management in Central Asia. At present, the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) is the

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highest water decision-making body in the region and the main institutional organization for the rational utilization and protection of trans-boundary water resources. However, the ICWC has no legal or enforcement powers, and it is not empowered to treat the jointly-linked problems of water and energy. For instance, Kenshimov said the ICWC was not able to address the delivery of cheap coal and gas this winter to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to compensate for reduced power generation at the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hydropower plants. (COMMENT: This water energy consortium is one of Nazarbayev's pet projects, but Uzbekistan's President Karimov refuses to cooperate, in part because of personal enmity between the two men, and in part because there is a rivalry for regional leadership between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Karimov allegedly sees this consortium as a power play to seize regional leadership away from Uzbekistan, which has been the traditional and historical leader in Central Asia. END COMMENT.)

KAZAKHSTAN'S KOKSARAY WATER RESERVOIR

17. (SBU) Kenshimov said that the government of Kazakhstan continues to work on the Koksaray Water Reservoir Project in southern Kazakhstan, launched on June 25. According to Kenshimov, this project has been pending for 10 years and the government finally approved it this spring. Its goal is two-fold: prevent winter flooding in the southern regions and increase control over crop irrigation in the dry summer seasons. (NOTE: In the absence of the Soviet-era management quotas, the energy-poor upstream states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan now commonly release water in the winter to generate electricity. The downstream countries of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan cannot use this winter water for irrigation, which is needed in the spring and summer. As a result, the downstream countries endure considerable flooding. This year alone, floods threatened 70 villages in two southern regions of Kazakhstan. On February 20, a huge flood left 13,000 people homeless. END NOTE.) The recent flooding in South Kazakhstan gave a renewed impetus to this initiative, Kenshimov said, and the government of Kazakhstan finally decided to start construction of the Koksaray water reservoir this year.

18. (SBU) NOTE: According to some environmentalists, the Koksaray Water Reservoir Project is controversial because of its possible environmental impact. The reservoir, in southern Kazakhstan, will be able to control the flow of the Syr-Darya River. While reservoir construction appears to be a good solution to the problem of flooding, some fear it might significantly reduce water flow in the Syr-Darya River, resulting in a further reduced flow of water to the Aral Sea area and irreversibly harming the climate. In addition, some in Uzbekistan are objecting to this project because it will reduce the flow to the Uzbekistan part of the Aidar-Arnasai lake system, making Uzbekistan dependent on Kazakhstan's timely releases of water to preserve the system's overall natural ecological balance. END NOTE.

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